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Amazon launches eBook reader

Online retailer Amazon has launched an electronic book reader that allows customers to download novels, magazines, newspapers and blogs to read on the go.

The device, called Kindle, features a 6in electronic paper display, which has a much higher contrast and lower battery requirements than LCD panels. It also has a built-in 3G Evolution-Data Optimised (EVDO) internet connection, so it doesn't require WiFi coverage or a PC to download content. Instead, it uses the existing mobile phone infrastructure.

"We've been working on Kindle for more than three years," said Amazon.com founder and CEO Jeff Bezos. "Our top design objective was for Kindle to disappear in your hands, so you can enjoy your reading."

"We also wanted to go beyond the physical book. Kindle is wireless, so whether you're lying in bed or riding on a train, you can think of a book and have it in less than 60 seconds. No computer is needed; you do your shopping directly from the device."

The device costs \$399 (around £200) to buy. Best-seller novels are available to download for about \$10 (around £4.80). Monthly newspaper subscriptions cost between \$5.99 and \$15 (around £2.90 and £7.30) per

month, while magazine subs are available from \$1.25 to \$3.49 (around £0.60 to £1.70) per month. Blogs cost as little as \$0.99 (around £0.48) each per month. There's no monthly charge as connection costs are built into the download prices.

Michael Gartenberg, an analyst at JupiterResearch, welcomed the device. "Amazon has a chance to take eBooks where they haven't gone before – out of the enthusiast market and into mainstream audiences," Gartenberg said. "Devices will likely appeal mostly to road warriors who like to read and hate to carry paper. As prices come down, we'll see more mass market adoption."

Not all reaction to Kindle was positive, however. Dean Bubley, founder of Disruptive Analysis, dismissed it as "quite expensive for what's essentially just a screen and some memory". Bubley also criticised the content model. He said, "I'm not really interested in locking my reading matter to a proprietary device for all eternity. At least with iTunes I can play music back through my PC as well."

Kindle is currently available only in the US. A UK launch date has yet to be announced. Initial stocks sold out within six hours of its launch.

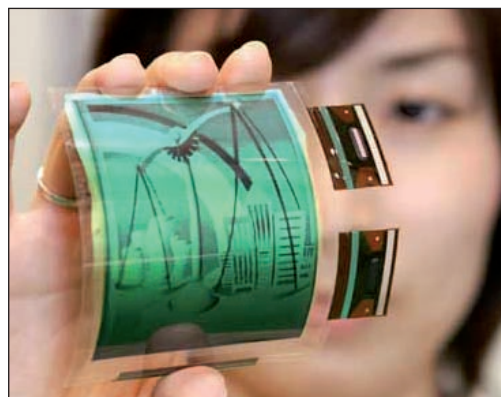


▲ The Kindle device: making it even easier to read the morning edition

Behind the headlines: what is electronic paper?

Electronic paper is a display technology that creates a high-contrast, low-power screen that can be read in a similar way to traditional books or newspapers. Electronic paper uses an electrophoretic display, which consists of millions of tiny black and white particles suspended in a clear viscous liquid. If a negative charge is applied, the white particles move to the top and become visible. If a positive charge is applied then the reverse happens and the black particles become visible.

The advantage of this type of display is that a backlight is not needed for the image to be visible. Also, it requires only electricity to change the image. Once it's set, it doesn't draw any further power until it has to be re-drawn. According to Amazon, the Kindle battery should last for a week's typical reading with the wireless functions turned off.



▲ Paper view: the technology mimics ink on paper

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Hotmail founder targets Microsoft Office

One of the founders of Hotmail has launched an online office suite to rival Microsoft's software version. Live Documents (www.live-documents.com) is a full office suite that supports written documents, spreadsheets and presentations, designed to rival Microsoft's Word, Excel and PowerPoint applications.

The system uses industry-standard technologies such as Adobe Flash and Flex, and allows users to access their documents wherever they have an internet connection and web browser. Live Documents uses a Flash-based interface, making it feel as responsive as native Office applications.

The suite also includes a desktop client that makes documents available offline, solving a common problem that affects rival online office suites. Dubbed a 'services plus software' approach, Live Documents provides flexibility to work on documents on a desktop or on a

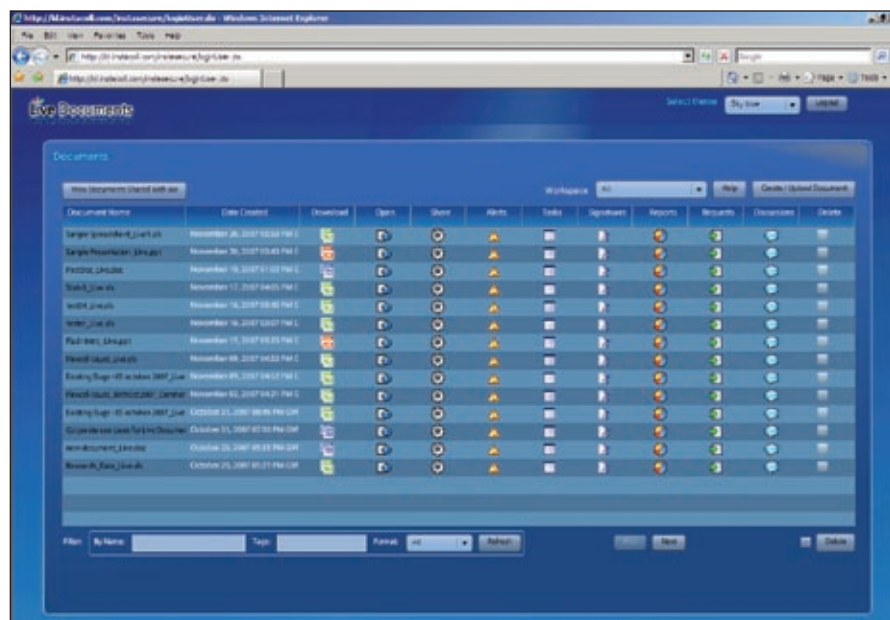
browser, either online or offline. Any changes that are made on either side are synchronised automatically, ensuring that the desktop and web versions are always in sync. Manual actions such as check-in/check-out, upload/download or import/export can be avoided.

The suite was developed by InstaColl, an Indian software firm that was established by Sabeer Bhatia, chairman of the company as well as one of the founders of Hotmail. Microsoft bought the webmail service in 1997 for a reported \$400m (around £200m). It is understood that some of the money Sabeer received from Microsoft through the sale went into financing InstaColl.

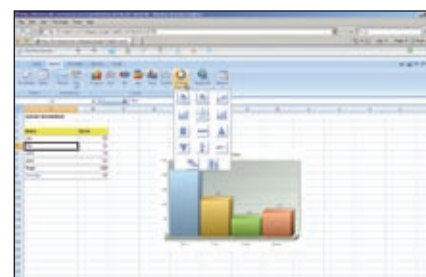
"Live Documents offers a unique perspective on Office productivity and collaboration that merges the best of two worlds: the richness and familiarity of desktop software with the collaborative capabilities of the web," said Bhatia.

"It provides a reliable bridge between the online and offline worlds that consumers and businesses can count on. Live Documents is the new productivity suite for the internet generation. It provides flexibility lacking in traditional software while retaining that which is important from the past and extending it with unique collaborative capabilities. I believe that Live Documents does for documents what Hotmail did for email."

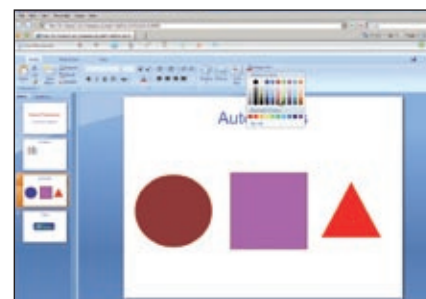
The system is available to preview by invitation and is expected to be available soon. Users can sign up to request an invitation at www.live-documents.com. The suite is free for personal use. A commercial version is available for enterprises in a hosted form or running from an onsite server. The first commercial enterprise version of Live Documents will be deployed at Aricent, a communications software company with over 6,700 employees globally.



▲ Live Documents can also be used offline, so you've always got access to your documents



▲ The spreadsheet application rivals Excel



▲ Powerful presentations can be created online

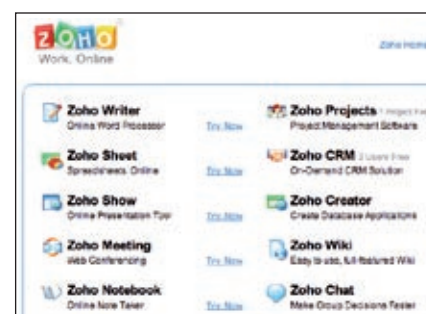
Behind the headlines: online office contenders

The introduction of fast, always-on broadband connections, combined with programming techniques such as Ajax, makes it possible to create applications that run within a web browser rather than natively on a desktop machine. Documents are stored centrally, so they are accessible wherever you have an internet connection, allowing you to work remotely from different machines and still have access to the same files.

Writely was one of the first online word processors, launched by Upstartle in August 2005. The company was later bought by Google,

who integrated Writely with its online spreadsheet application and renamed it Google Docs. A presentation tool was later added. The suite is free to use and can be found at <http://docs.google.com>.

Zoho offers a rival office suite that includes a word processor, spreadsheet and presentation package, and also further applications such as a database, a project-management application and even a CRM tool. Some applications are free to use, but others require you to pay a fee to use all the features available. Zoho is available at www.zoho.com.



▲ Zoho is a comprehensive office suite

Skype withdraws London numbers

Internet telephony company Skype has withdrawn hundreds of London telephone numbers used by customers of its Skypeln service with only one month's notice.

Skypeln provides customers with a normal telephone number on which they can receive Skype calls at a cost of £35 a year. Skype provided only one month's notice to customers that their numbers would be changing, which could result in huge costs to businesses using the service, either from calls to the old number going unanswered or having to order new stationery with updated details.

According to Skype, the problem was due to negotiations with one of its suppliers of London 020 7 numbers breaking down.

"During the past couple of weeks, we've been talking to a number of Skypeln users, asking them to change their London-based 020 7 Skypeln number," said Skype spokesperson Villu Arak. "We don't like doing this any more than those who'll be losing their number."

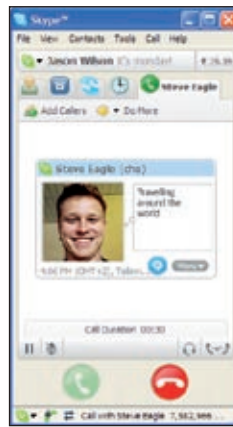
"As you may know, Skype obtains Skypeln numbers from several telecoms operators. That's because Skype itself is not a telecommunication company," Arak explained. "When it comes to things that involve the 'plain old telephone

system', we are also someone else's customers. Mostly, this works out without a hitch. We obtain rights to use the numbers and provide them to our users as a neat, inexpensive way to bridge the telephone-Skype divide through Skypeln."

Arak continued, "We spent months in discussions with a telecoms operator to see if we could keep the Skypeln numbers we rented from them, confident that the issue could be resolved. Hence the somewhat late notice to our users. We never thought things would get this far, given the time and effort put into resolving the situation."

Skype has offered to give affected customers a new number free for a year along with voicemail at no extra cost, but is currently not offering a solution that allows customers to keep their existing number.

Internet telephony company Voipfone, however, is offering to port customers' original Skypeln numbers on to its system so they can continue using them.



▲ Some Skype users will lose their phone number

A notice on the Voipfone site reads: "You probably know that Skype has announced that it is cancelling many of its 020 7 telephone numbers. This is understandably causing a great deal of concern and inconvenience to their customers."

"However, the good news is that if you need to keep your 020 7 number, you can transfer it to Voipfone – usually within 24 hours," it continued.

Transferring numbers to Voipfone normally costs £20 plus VAT, but the company is offering to reduce that fee to £10 for affected Skypeln customers. Once the number has been successfully transferred to Voipfone, it costs £1.99 plus VAT per month to maintain.

In order to transfer numbers, Voipfone requires customers to fax them with their details and authorise the transfer. A copy of the fax is available on Voipfone's website at www.voipfone.co.uk/skype.php, along with further information on transferring numbers to the service.

New version of Firefox released

Mozilla has released a beta version of Firefox 3. The final release isn't expected for some time, but the preview release is designed for developers so they can test new features and find any bugs before the final version is released.

The beta is not designed for the general public, and therefore users should not expect their current add-ons to work properly with this version.

Firefox 3 Beta 1 is based on the new Gecko 1.9 web-rendering platform, which has been under development since 2005 and fixes more than 11,000 issues. Gecko 1.9 includes some major changes to improve performance and stability. Firefox 3 has been built on top of this new platform, resulting in a more secure browser.

Security improvements include access to one-click site information. You can simply click the site icon in the location bar to see who owns the site you're browsing. Identity verification is prominently displayed and easier to understand.

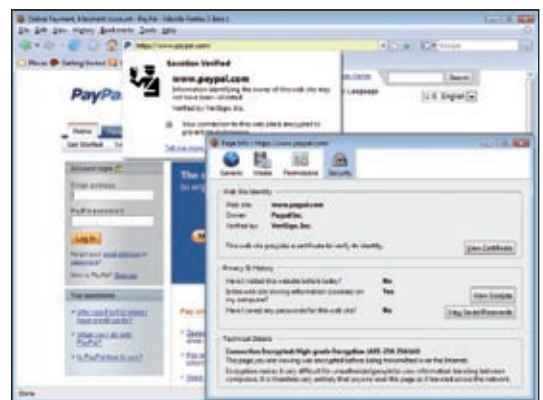
New malware and forgery protection will alert you if you arrive at site that is known to install viruses, spyware, Trojans or other malware.

Firefox will also check any installed add-ons for security issues and disable any older, insecure versions.

Password management has been made easier, with an information bar replacing the old password dialog box. The Download Manager has also been revamped to make it much easier to locate downloaded files. Resumable downloading is now supported, so you can now resume downloads after restarting the browser or resetting your network connection.

Firefox 3 now stores bookmarks, history, cookies and preferences in a secure database that will prevent data loss even if the system crashes.

Under-the-hood changes to help developers include new graphics and font handling in Gecko 1.9, which provides rendering improvements for CSS and SVG, as well as improved display of fonts with ligatures and complex scripts. Offline support is now also included. This enables web applications to



▲ Firefox 3 includes a number of new security improvements, including the ability to check a site's authenticity with one click

provide offline functionality. Website authors must add support for offline browsing to their site for this feature to be available to users.

The preview release of Firefox 3 is available to download now from www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/all-beta.html.

Firefox timeline The development of the open-source browser

Mozilla.org project launched by Netscape to create a dedicated team and website to support the development of free web browser. Little over a month later the source code to Netscape Communicator was posted on the site.



1998 – Mozilla project

Mozilla 1.0 released. The software consists of a suite of applications including a web browser, email client and news reader. The suite is no longer in active development, but its source code provided the foundations for the Firefox browser.



2002 – Mozilla 1.0

Firefox 1.0 released. Originally called Phoenix, then Firebird, and finally Firefox, the program was started by programmers Dave Hyatt and Blake Ross to combat what they perceived as bloat in Mozilla. Firefox became the official focus of development in April 2003.



2004 – Firefox 1.0

Nearly two years later, Firefox 2 was launched. The new browser featured anti-phishing features as well as stability improvements and updates to tabbed browsing and how extensions are handled. So far the browser has been downloaded over 400 million times.



2006 – Firefox 2.0



Dell unveils motion-sensitive HD multimedia PC

Dell has released a motion-sensitive all-in-one PC that also doubles as an HD entertainment centre. The XPS One features a 20in widescreen display and built-in TV tuner, and can be configured to include a Blu-ray drive, so you can play back high-definition movies.

In addition to the traditional keyboard input, the XPS One also features motion-sensitive multimedia keys. When your hand approaches the display, the media keys and slot-loading drive illuminate with a soft blue glow.

CEO and founder Michael Dell said it was "perhaps the most beautiful Dell ever" and claimed it could "redefine the personal computer in the home".

To cut down on cable clutter, the XPS One requires only a single wire for power. All other connections are handled wirelessly. A wireless keyboard and mouse are included in the box, and it also features Wi-Fi and Bluetooth 2.0.

The XPS One is supported by Dell's First Class service, which includes fast access to Dell technicians to help solve any problems and a 15-month subscription to virus and spyware programs. Also included with the



▲ Dell's XPS One reacts to a hand movement as it approaches the screen

system is a one-year subscription to Dell's DataSafe online backup service, which proves 10GB of storage space to backup files and documents.

The XPS One is currently available only in the US and Japan. A UK launch date has yet to be confirmed. For more information, go to www.dell.com/theonepc.

Further service pack planned for Windows XP

Microsoft is planning to release an update for its Windows XP operating system in the first half of 2008. A preview release of XP Service Pack 3 (SP3) was given to 15,000 testers in November and, if everything goes to plan, the final version could be available to users by the summer.

Despite finally launching the much delayed Windows Vista operating system at the beginning of 2007, Microsoft is still committed to supporting the previous version of Windows, which is still in use on many

computers, particularly those in corporate environments.

According to Microsoft, XP SP3 is currently due to be released in the first six months of 2008, but the final date will depend on how testing progresses. The six-month window isn't guaranteed and the timing of the release will be based on customer feedback as the first priority, according to a company spokesperson.

Although the current release is limited to a closed set of testers, Microsoft is planning a wider release that can be tested by the

general public, but it hasn't committed to a launch date for that yet.

The company is not currently divulging what features will be included in the final SP3 release, but it is understood to include over 1,000 fixes and patches that have been issued in the past three years. It is also expected to contain at least four new features, although some are thought to be ports of existing Vista tools.

Windows XP was released in October 2001, with the SP2 update launched in August 2004.

T-Mobile forced out of exclusive iPhone deal

Vodafone has successfully managed to prevent T-Mobile becoming the exclusive carrier of Apple's iPhone in Germany.

So far Apple has only released its touch-sensitive iPhone on a single network in each country the handset has been sold, in exchange for a cut of the network's revenue.

Apple chose T-Mobile in Germany, O₂ in the UK and Orange in France, but Vodafone has won an injunction in a Hamburg court forcing Apple and T-Mobile to supply a version of the phone that isn't locked to a specific network and can be used with any operator's SIM card.

In Germany, the iPhone sells for €399 (around £286) – a little more than it costs in the UK – and customers have to sign up to a two-year contract with T-Mobile costing at least €1,176 (around £844).

T-Mobile shops are the only place German customers can purchase an

iPhone, since Apple doesn't have any of its own retail outlets there.

However, although the companies are complying with the ruling, the unlocked iPhone is priced significantly higher than the network-specific model. Without a contract, the handset costs €999 (around £720), plus the additional cost of network charges.

Customers that purchase the SIM-free version need to connect it to iTunes to unlock it for use on other networks. The handset's International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI) number – which gives it its unique identification – is recorded at the point of purchase and sent to Apple. Only once it's been confirmed by the company can the phone be unlocked by connecting to iTunes.

The ruling in Germany is unlikely to affect the current deal between Apple and O₂ in the UK, since different regulations regarding mobile networks apply.



▲ Customers in Germany can choose their network

IN BRIEF

GOOGLE ANNOUNCES ANDROID PLATFORM

Google has finally confirmed that it is entering the hardware market. It is heading a consortium of companies that will develop Android, "the first truly open and comprehensive platform for mobile devices".

T-Mobile, HTC, Qualcomm and Motorola are among the 34 firms who have joined the Open Handset Alliance. Its aim is to provide developers, wireless operators and handset manufacturers with a platform for faster and cheaper products.

MOBILE FIRMS BACK FEMTOCELLS

More than 30 telecoms companies, including Nokia and O₂, have signed up to the Femto Forum, a consortium dedicated to developing femtocell technologies.

Femtocells are low-power wireless access points that allow users to connect to their mobile operator's 3G network via a broadband connection. Mobile operators are hoping the widescale adoption of the technology will allow them to compete with landline operators such as BT on call packages.

UNPATCHED IPHONES POSE SECURITY RISK

Owners of unlocked iPhones who decline to install Apple's latest updates are exposing themselves to a significant security risk, research has found.

Using Metasploit, an open-source tool for executing exploit code against a remote target, security consultant Rik Farrow was able to take control of an iPhone using nothing more than a webpage.

PALM OS AVAILABLE ON NOKIA TABLETS

The legacy component of the Access Linux Platform (ALP) operating system is to be made available on Nokia internet tablets, allowing them to run Palm OS Garnet applications. Access picked up development of the Palm OS with the purchase of PalmSource in 2005.



IN BRIEF

HOLLYWOOD EMBRACES THE 'DIGITAL COPY'

Two Hollywood studios are to release DVDs that include a 'digital copy' of the movie.

Twentieth Century Fox will be the first, with disc two of the *Live Free or Die Hard* special edition containing two extra copies of the movie: one for the PC and one for portable devices.

Warner Bros will follow suit with the release of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*.

BBC NEW MEDIA BOSS WANTS "WORLD BEYOND DRM"

The BBC's head of Future Media and Technology believes that the corporation's programming will eventually be available without DRM restrictions.

Ashley Highfield came under attack from Linux and Mac advocates earlier this year when he said that a lack of open-source DRM solutions currently prevented the BBC from launching its download service on non-Windows platforms. However, Highfield now says that the iPlayer's current dependence on Microsoft's DRM is "probably only an interim solution".

UK RETAILERS CALL FOR DITCHING OF DRM

UK music retailers have called on record companies to scrap DRM. Kim Bayley, director-general of the Entertainment Retailers Association (ERA), said that the competing usage restriction technologies are "stifling growth and working against the consumer interest".

The BPI, which represents UK record labels, said recently that 150 million downloads have now been sold in the UK. Bayley said that is a pitiful figure.

RADIOHEAD REAPS JUST £1 PER DOWNLOAD

Radiohead fans paid an average of just £1.08 to download the band's new album, *In Rainbows*, reports suggest.

The group invited fans to pay whatever they liked for the album. According to market research firm ComScore, 62 per cent of downloaders elected to pay nothing whatsoever, while fewer than 12 per cent paid more than £4.

Despite this, Comscore still estimates that the band has so far made £1.3 million from the release of the album.

Game leaves violence intact

Violent scenes are still accessible despite censors' requests

A controversial computer game that censors found so objectionable that they asked developers to reduce the in-game violence still contains the disputed content.

Rockstar Games was forced to edit *Manhunt 2*, toning it down so that the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) dropped its AO (Adults Only) rating to an M (Mature) level. It did so by applying video effects to scenes of execution-style killings, partially obscuring details including stabbings, stranglings and beatings.

However, programmers have managed to alter some of the edits, resurrecting the original content. This highlights the fact that, rather than removing the violent scenes, the games developer merely altered them in a reversible fashion.

This latest furore has been compared by many media sources to another censorship problem with a previous Rockstar title. Players discovered that there was hidden content in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*.

This content featured sub-games involving sexual scenes, and the resulting publicity led to US Senator Hillary Clinton calling for an investigation into the source of the modification. The game had its rating raised to AO until a revised version, without the hidden games, was released.

In both the cases of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (GTA:SA) and *Manhunt 2*, players need to take significant steps to unlock the censored scenes, including using modification software which is not generally available to the public. In the case of *Manhunt 2*, players also need a modified PlayStation Portable



▲ *Manhunt 2* continues to court controversy

(PSP) console to be able to render the violent scenes without the video effects.

There is a significant difference in the way the two games have been modified. Whereas GTA:SA contained additional gameplay, the censored version of *Manhunt 2* merely applies special effects filters to the violent scenes of the original, rather than removing anything fundamental to the game. To date, no extra sub- or mini-games have been found in *Manhunt 2*.

For the curious, a quick search of YouTube will uncover a number of videos of *Manhunt 2*'s gameplay, both censored and in its full and original gory detail. This is as close as UK gamers will get to seeing either version, as the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) has so far refused to license the game in any of its current forms.

P2P users "are bandwidth hogs"

P2P users that consume more than their fair share of bandwidth are freeloaders, according to Mark Cuban, chairman of US cable network HDNet.

Cuban claimed that the internet backbone has sufficient bandwidth to support their actions, but P2P users are "consuming more and more last-mile bandwidth".

"As a consumer, I want my internet experience to be as fast as possible," said Cuban in a post on his blog at www.blogmaverick.com. "The last thing I want slowing my internet service down are P2P freeloaders."

"Does anyone really think it's free? That all the bandwidth consumed with content being distributed by P2P isn't being paid for by someone? That bandwidth is being paid for by consumers."

Cuban thinks that ISPs should charge a premium to users who want to use P2P services, although he concedes that many wouldn't pay the additional charges.

For sharing audio and video, Cuban suggests that web services such as Google Video are far more efficient and preferable because Google subsidises the bandwidth costs.

Philips opens new high-tech windows

Philips has unveiled a window designed for high-tech hotels, called Daylight. It looks like a regular window, but by standing in front of it and waving a hand the user can make a pattern appear and even change the colour of the tint.

The window can be made to black out completely for sleeping, negating the need for traditional curtains. In the morning, the window can be set to reveal more daylight slowly, as a natural alarm clock. For frequent travellers, Daylight can also run a light therapy session, which should help reduce the effects of jetlag.

Those concerned about the environment needn't worry, as Philips has announced that the technology will be solar powered. No details were available on the technology used to generate the patterns.

Computer Shopper saw a working model at a recent event in London, and was very impressed. Those eager to try it out for themselves will have to wait, though, as commercial versions of Daylight won't be ready for at least five years.



▲ Philips' Daylight technology could mean it's curtains for curtains

When is 'unlimited' not unlimited? When your ISP says so

Broadband accounts that offer unlimited downloads are unprofitable and unsustainable, a leading UK ISP has claimed. According to PlusNet, which has 200,000 customers in the UK and won the Best Broadband Provider in *Shopper's* 2007 awards, the wholesale cost that ISPs pay for bandwidth has remained relatively static, while the price consumers pay for internet access has fallen dramatically.

A customer paying £10 a month and downloading more than 2GB is unprofitable, according to the ISP. "At £9.99, once the customer uses more than 1 or 2GB a month they become loss making," Neil Armstrong, products and marketing director for PlusNet told *Shopper*. "Likewise, at £14.99 more than 10GB becomes loss making."

Armstrong accused ISPs that claim to offer unlimited downloads of lying, arguing that the economics of the market in the UK aren't sufficient to provide unmetered accounts.

According to Armstrong, it's only once customers are tied into a lengthy contract that they discover that the small print in the contract – or the acceptable usage policy – doesn't permit them to download as much data as they want.

"Some [broadband products] are marketed as unlimited, but once you go over 10GB they start throttling you," said Armstrong. "It's hard for customers to find out what is acceptable usage."

The wholesale cost of providing 1GB of bandwidth in the UK is between 50 and 60p once all other costs have been accounted for. PlusNet has seen the average amount of data its customers download per month increase by 30 per cent in the past 12 months. The average amount in October 2007 was 6.5GB, up from 5GB the year before.

The situation will only get worse due to the introduction of easy to use, consumer-oriented video applications such as the BBC's iPlayer, Armstrong warned. "Typically video on demand and filesharing were early adopter applications. The iPlayer brings it to the masses," he said.

PlusNet would like to see broadband download limits more clearly advertised, with transparent information on bandwidth charges.

According to Ofcom, the marketing of broadband services is an issue for the Advertising Standards Authority. "At present, the Advertising Standards Authority currently deals with issues concerning the marketing of broadband services," an Ofcom spokesperson said. "They currently allow the use of the word 'unlimited' on the following two provisos.

"First, that the advertiser indicates in the ad that there is a fair usage policy – ie, unreasonable use of bandwidth at peak times could lead to capping.

"Second, the ISP will only cap users whose use is atypical. This will only affect a very small handful of users whose use of bandwidth is excessive."

BT, which offers unlimited downloads on its top-level package, has a fair-usage policy for users downloading what it considers an excessive amount of data, but claims that it affects only a small number of users.

"BT offers unlimited usage allowance on its BT Total Broadband Option 3 package, despite the variable cost of providing that bandwidth," a BT spokesperson said. "It is possible to do this through sophisticated management of customer needs and bandwidth across the network.

"We also have a fair-usage policy to ensure that downloads of 'industrial' levels over a consumer service do not impinge on the activities of other customers, but this only affects a tiny minority of users."



NEWS ANALYSIS

Who should pay for increased bandwidth costs?

Back in the pre-broadband dial-up days, bandwidth charges weren't an issue: you paid for every minute you were using the internet, so providing the ISP had done its sums correctly there was no way you could use more than you were paying for.

Unlike the USA, where users had free local calls so could connect to their ISP with no charge and only have to pay a monthly fee for access, users in the UK were not so lucky. Even so-called free dial-up accounts used 0845 or 0870 numbers (earning the ISP a tidy slice of the call revenue), so there was no way to surf without constantly watching the clock.

The introduction of fast, always-on connections via ADSL

changed all that. Finally you could leave your internet connection on permanently and not have to worry about a huge phone bill at the end of the month.

However, it still took some time for us to get used to this new-found digital freedom. Napster was still just an illegal upstart that not many people knew about and the largest amount of data that most people shifted about was a few one-megapixel photos from their newly purchased, top-of-the-range digital camera. However, many email systems would send back anything over 1MB (some still do), so most bandwidth was being used for plain old web surfing and maybe listening to the odd trial internet radio station.

Windows updates were just about pushing two figures, but there wasn't the same reliance then on pushing out multi-megabyte fixes after the fact and expecting the consumer to download and install them.

Even now, there still aren't that many people using file-sharing applications, despite what the music industry and Hollywood would have you believe. The rise in bandwidth use is down to sites such as YouTube, which make video just a push of a button away.

According to the market research company ComScore, UK users are the biggest consumers of online streamed video, with 80 per cent of the online population watching video online, compared to 76 per cent in the US and 70 per cent in Germany. However, despite the large number of users accessing clips, ComScore found that video occupied only ten per cent of time online.

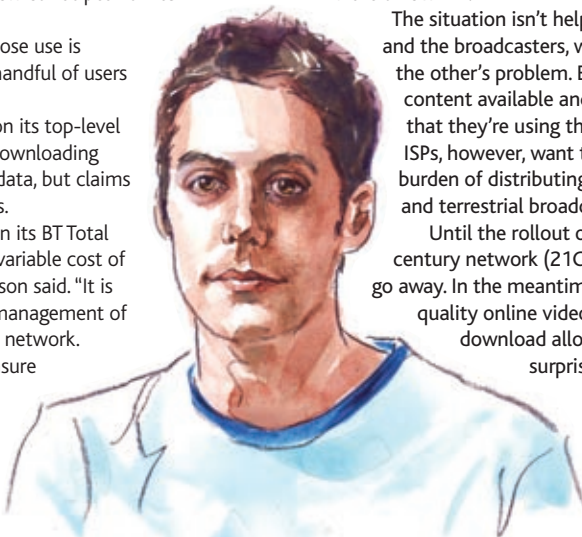
The real test for what ISPs deem acceptable usage will come once people start tucking into the wealth of high-quality, easily accessible video on offer from the likes of Channel 4 and the BBC. Both broadcasters have launched download services in the past year that provide more than just the short, low-res clips you'll find on YouTube.

With full-length soaps, documentaries and movies in near-DVD quality just a download away, a user whose monthly usage would typically be around 1GB with email, web surfing and the odd YouTube clip here and there could see it increase ten-fold once a few hours of broadcast-quality TV are thrown in.

The situation isn't helped by the current stand-off between the ISPs and the broadcasters, with both sides saying that bandwidth usage is the other's problem. Broadcasters claim they are simply making the content available and that it's down to the consumer to ensure that they're using the correct broadband account to download it. ISPs, however, want the broadcasters to shoulder some of the burden of distributing the content, just as they do with satellite and terrestrial broadcasts.

Until the rollout of BT's high-capacity next-generation 21st century network (21CN), it doesn't look like the problem is going to go away. In the meantime, if you do fancy dipping into some high-quality online video, then make sure you find out what your download allowance is first – or you could be in for a nasty surprise at the end of the month.

Will Head
News Editor



IN BRIEF

MUSIC BOSS ADMITS FILE-SHARING MISTAKES

The boss of Warner Music has said that the music industry has to take some of the blame for the rise of P2P file sharing.

Speaking at the GSMA Mobile Asia Congress, Edgar Bronfman told mobile operators that they must not make the same mistake as the music industry. "By standing still or moving at a glacial pace, we inadvertently went to war with consumers by denying them what they wanted and could otherwise find, and as a result of course consumers won," he said.

DIGITAL BEATLES 'SORT OF READY' IN 2008

The long and winding road to The Beatles' debut at digital music stores is almost at an end, according to Sir Paul McCartney, but don't expect to start downloading until next year.

McCartney said everything is "sort of ready". He added that the delay has been down to contractual issues as well as deliberate planning. The Beatles have always carefully managed their releases, only putting their albums on CD several years after the format took off.

CLASSICS AND JAZZ LABEL EMBRACES MP3

A leading record label is the latest to ditch DRM. Universal Music's Classics and Jazz label said that it is "exploring consumer demand" for unrestricted MP3 downloads.

MP3s are encoded at the maximum 320Kbps bit rate and cost the same as the restricted 320Kbps WMA files. Anyone who has already bought an album from the site will be offered a free upgrade to MP3.

EMUSIC SUBSCRIBERS ON THE RISE

EMusic has added 50,000 new subscribers in the past six months, cementing its position as the number two music downloads service after iTunes.

The service's 350,000 subscribers now have access to more than three million DRM-free tracks, all from independent labels. Members pay a monthly fee that entitles them to a fixed number of downloads each month. If the whole allowance, which cannot be carried over, is used then the per track price can fall to less than 20p.

Your say: unlimited broadband accounts

PlusNet is claiming that unlimited broadband accounts are uneconomical in the UK and that ISPs that offer them won't be able to sustain them.

We asked members of *Computer Shopper's* forum what they thought about the issue. Here's what they had to say:

Is this the start of another battle of survival for ISPs? The last time I read a statement like this was back in the dialup dark ages when I was forced to switch ISPs a few times as one after the other they either went to the wall or were swallowed up by a larger, profit-hungry competitor.

Login: Pegasus27, joined: 08 Feb 2005, posts: 11

Hypocrisy of the highest order. Some time ago I signed up to a PlusNet unlimited account only for it to introduce a fair usage policy shortly afterwards – and I pay the extra for the premium



▲ Does 'unlimited broadband' really mean unlimited – and is it feasible for ISPs to offer it?

service! Needless to say I felt rather annoyed at the time and still do now.

Login: attenboroughp, joined: 07 Dec 2003, posts: 6,662

My blood always boils when I see the unlimited word – you always know there will be a fair usage policy lurking in the shadows. If there's an ISP reading this, stop changing the English language!

Login: daftfunk, joined: 21 Sep 2004, posts: 572

I would be very reluctant to sign up for an unlimited account without knowing what the limit was. And the ISP that says it doesn't have a limit is lying. If and when I review my ISP I would prefer to stay on a deal that explicitly states the limit and what the per-gig charge is thereafter so I know exactly where I stand.

Login: john_sn, joined: 13 Sep 2006, posts: 74

Until recently I lived in Japan, where for around 20 quid a month I had a 24Mbit/s connection and what I now know were genuine unlimited downloads. I consistently downloaded 100-150GB a month, sometimes more.

Login: SamuraiKangaroo, joined: 21 Feb 2006, posts: 3

Unfortunately PlusNet is correct. If you look at the cost of wholesale broadband from BT it cannot be sustained at the current and expected usage level without a price rise.

If you want someone to blame, and I know I do, then go shout at Ofcom for having such a cosy relationship with BT.

Login: Rocklett, joined: 20 Dec 2006, posts: 5

CRAZE

What the web is really for with Will Head

How to... throw a sickie on live TV

Depending on where you stand on workplace sickies, you probably wouldn't begrudge a fellow colleague phoning in sick if they had a bout of man flu or had been laid low from a night of over-indulgence. Some people, of course, wear their ability to turn up at the office, no matter how serious the diagnosis, as a badge of honour.

Swedish TV game show host Eva Nazemson clearly falls into the latter category, judging by her sterling efforts to carry on presenting despite suffering from intense period pains. She still managed to turn up for work to present a late-night phone-in competition, which was beamed live into homes across Scandinavia.

She'd barely started her shift that evening when she was struck with a sudden bout of extreme nausea. While taking a call from a participant, the feelings overwhelmed her and she paused for a second before quickly vomiting off camera.

Many would have thrown in the towel at that point and downed tools, but not Eva. After stepping out of shot momentarily to regain her composure she quickly returned back onscreen to explain the reason behind her sudden sickness. She

then went on to present for a further two hours until her time was up and another presenter took over.

In these days of instant internet replay, it didn't take long for the footage to make its way to video sharing sites, securing Eva her 15 million downloads of fame. Given that the original footage was in Swedish, it didn't take long for crafty folk to create their own amusing made-up subtitles to depict the onscreen action. One went so far as to re-edit the footage to create a fictional new game show called "Make Me Puke!", which if you're not averse to puerile humour and onscreen vomiting can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/lytc9ku>.





First looks

Every month we bring you sneak previews of the latest kit from www.computershopper.co.uk

Zalman 3D Monitor

Most PC games are set in three-dimensional virtual worlds. Unfortunately, these 3D environments have to be reduced to a 2D image for a PC monitor. So we were excited to see Zalman's new range of monitors, which are capable of tricking your brain into seeing 3D information.

The monitor comes with a normal-looking pair of glasses, with clip-ons provided for those who already wear specs. The clear lenses are polarised so they only accept light at a particular orientation. The monitors have a pair of special polarising filters on the front that match those in the glasses.

3D worlds are rendered from two different perspectives. The two images are combined into a single image with the extra 3D information presented in a series of horizontal and vertical elements. This tricks your eyes into seeing in 3D thanks to the polarising filters on the glasses.

The impact varies considerably depending on what content you are viewing. Demonstration clips were impressive in places. A fish appeared to swim

partly out of the screen towards us. However, it's hard to know how much specially filmed video content will be available.

More exciting is the support for 3D games. We saw Painkiller running and the effect was certainly more immersive. Large objects and architecture benefit the most, with walls looming towards you, and strafing around objects or enemies produced a strong sensation of 3D.

Drivers are still at an early stage and some objects looked blurred. The monitors will generate the 3D effect only with Nvidia graphics cards, as the company is working closely with Zalman. The current driver only supports up to series 7 GeForce cards for DirectX 9 games under Windows XP. However, a new Vista driver with support for series 8 cards is expected soon.

The 22in widescreen ZM-M220W will sell in the UK for around £430 inc VAT, with the ZM-M190W costing £380 inc VAT, both from www.quietpc.com. We'll bring you full reviews next month.



Linksys DMA 2100 and DMA 2200

Plenty of products will stream music, video and photo files wirelessly from your PC. Linksys's DMA 2100 and 2200 are different. They work exclusively with Microsoft's Media Center, which is included with Windows Vista Home Premium and Ultimate.

The only differences between the two models is the DMA 2200's built-in upscaling DVD player. Both have HDMI and component outputs with support for resolutions up to 1080p, and there's RGB SCART for those with CRT TVs. Linksys has included support for Draft-N wireless networking, as well as the usual 802.11g and wired options.

The Extender's interface looks almost identical to Media Center on Vista, other than a

few missing transparency effects. Everything worked smoothly, with the Extender reacting quickly to our inputs on the supplied remote. You'll be able to stream most common media file formats, including MP3, JPEG and MPEG4, though the final list hasn't yet been confirmed.



One big advantage of the Media Center Extender over other streaming devices is that you can also stream live and recorded TV from your PC, as long as it has a Media Center-compatible TV tuner. You get full Media Center capabilities, including timeshifting, the excellent TV guide and scheduling features such as series link recording.

The only Media Centre Extender currently available in the UK is the Xbox 360. At less than £200, and with the capability to play games as well, it's a bargain. However, it's a lot bigger and noisier than these new devices.

The DMA 2100 will cost £200 and the 2200 £230. Look out for our in-depth reviews as soon as we receive production models.

Edifier M3200

The distinctive design of Edifier's M3200 speakers gives the impression that they aspire to more than just sitting on a cluttered office desk.

Their shape gives a highly directed sound output, which can be effective if they're positioned correctly. For solitary listening, we got the best results by sitting between them, while to fill a room with music we found it best to position them as far apart as we could and angle them away from each other. Bass is controlled by a knob on the back of the subwoofer, while the main volume control is on a cable.

Sound was sharp, clear and intense, with bright high notes and a thundering bass. This sound balance worked well for pop, rock and dance music, but we noticed a lack of detail and warmth in the rendition of classical and orchestral music.

In their optimal position for solitary listening, the M3200s created the effect of a bubble of sound that wrapped around us, but they're not ideal for all kinds of music and can be a bit fiddly to position to their best effect. The M3200 speakers cost £53 from www.cms-computers.co.uk.

